



Gift Cards Play into Seasonal Scams

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MADISON – Like many holiday shoppers, you may be planning to stock up on gift cards. And like anything else that attracts consumers' dollars, gift cards also draw the attention of scammers. The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection asks shoppers to use caution when facing promises of discounted or free gift cards.

“You want gift cards and scammers want your money, so it’s only natural that these cards would be used in their cons,” said Frank Frassetto, Division Administrator for Trade and Consumer Protection. “Gift card fraud pops up most often in the form of second-hand card sales rip-offs and social media and email scams that use free gift card offers as clickbait.”

It is best to buy gift cards directly from the retailer or from an authorized merchant, but if you are considering buying an unused card second-hand, purchase it from someone you know and trust. Used or unwanted gift cards show up for sale online through auction sites and classified ads, and while some cards may be legitimate, others may be counterfeit, may be drained of their value, or may have been stolen from a store and never activated at a register. If the gift card merchant discovers that your card is fraudulent, the merchant will deactivate the gift card and refuse to honor it for purchases.

Gift cards are also at the core of a number of social media, text message and email scams, with spam messages promising a \$500 or \$1,000 gift card from a major retailer in exchange for completing a survey or paying a small shipping charge. Within the message is a link to start the redemption process, but clicking that link could load malware to your device or send you to a site that is set up to capture your personal or banking information. If you receive a similar message, delete it and do not click any links.

For additional information or to file a complaint, visit the Consumer Protection Bureau at datcp.wisconsin.gov, send an e-mail to datcp hotline@wisconsin.gov or call the Consumer Protection Hotline toll-free at 1-800-422-7128.

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